

REPRESENTATIVE

# Steve Conway

29TH DISTRICT



Summer 1997

Dear Friends and Constituents,

The 1997 legislative session can best be characterized as The Good, The Bad and The Ugly. As you will see in this report, we did make significant progress on Juvenile Justice Reform, Welfare Reform, and Trauma Care funding. These were priorities for the 29<sup>th</sup> District.

After much partisan debate and a Governor's veto, we also passed a budget that continues current funding levels for public education and our criminal justice system. However, and here is the bad, funding for these crucial public priorities did not keep pace with population growth and cost-of-living increases.

We sent a property-tax relief measure to voters that drives \$34 of relief per year to homeowners of \$100,000 homes and millions to corporate businesses in our state.

We gave Business and Occupation tax relief to businesses, but the vast proportion of that relief will go to large firms and corporations rather than to the small businesses of the 29<sup>th</sup> district.

And then the ugly moments of the session. Despite a budget surplus of over a half billion dollars, we failed to fully fund our state's Workforce Training Program, which is essential to the efforts of our state's working families to keep pace with a rapidly changing economy.

We added only 8,000 people to our state's Basic Health Plan program, despite a waiting list of over 70,000 people. We found the will to send a football funding proposal to voters, but not the will to find a solution to our state's transportation needs, or to provide a needed cost-of-living increase to our school employees, teachers, and state employees.

All in all, the 1997 session sends mixed messages. There is some good in this session for our district, but the session continued the process of shifting wealth to the few rather than expanding opportunity for the many. We can and must do better.

Yours sincerely,

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## ► The Good

### *Juvenile Justice Reform*

One of the most significant accomplishments of the 1997 legislative session was the historic revision of the 1977 Juvenile Justice Code. As signed, the new law:

- 1) Provides judges with broader sentencing ranges and options for minor and middle offenders heretofore subject to mere slaps on the wrist;
- 2) Enhances sentences for crimes committed with firearms and automatically sends the most violent juvenile offenders to adult courts;
- 3) Expands drug and alcohol treatment sentencing options as well as other community-based employment and education rehabilitation options;
- 4) Requires parents and/or guardians to attend their children's hearings or be subject to being held in contempt of court.

Most critics acknowledge that this reform finally gives juvenile justice officials the tools to deal effectively with first time offenders while strengthening punishment options for serious offenders.

### *Trauma Care Funding*

I was on the conference committee that produced a bipartisan proposal to create a dedicated state fund of over \$11 million per year for trauma care services. This fund will assist all local communities in meeting the costs of uninsured trauma care services. The dedicated fund was signed into law in Tacoma, which has had no designated trauma center to handle life and death emergencies since March, 1996.

### *Welfare Reform*

The Legislature enacted historic welfare reforms this year that will emphasize the core value of work and help welfare recipients make the transition to gainful employment. Early versions of the bill undermined labor standards

for working families and treated legal immigrants unfairly. But hard negotiations and selective vetoes ultimately produced firm but fair reforms. Key provisions include:

**Work is the #1 priority** — Recipients, except those caring for children under age one, must begin an intensive job search as soon as they are approved for benefits. Those who can't find a job will participate in community service. Work activities must not displace current workers.

**5-year lifetime limit** — Consistent with federal law, benefits are limited to 5 years, with some exceptions for adults who care for elderly or disabled relatives.

**Child care** — Available to all low income workers who earn less than 175% of the federal poverty level.

**License suspension** — Parents of dependent children who fail to pay child support risk having their drivers', professional, business, and recreational licenses suspended.

These principles promise to break the cycle of welfare, but it will demand a community-centered effort to provide meaningful jobs and support for this transition to work.



Rep. Steve Conway, third from left, joins other state and local leaders as a new dedicated state fund for trauma care is signed into law.

## Work-release Siting

With strong support from the Oakland-Madrona neighborhood group, my bill to make all work-release facilities subject to community-notification requirements passed unanimously. By closing a loophole that allowed privately-contracted facilities to side-step these requirements, the new law ensures that no work-release facility can be sited without full notification of local schools, neighborhood groups and property owners, and mandatory public meetings for questions and comments.

## Business District Revitalization — East Tacoma, Oakland, Lincoln, South Tacoma, Garfield St.

I also sponsored several bills to provide tax incentives to business districts and bring the state into partnerships with important neighborhood revitalization efforts in East Tacoma, Oakland, South Tacoma Way, Garfield Street, and other communities. The Legislature and Governor agreed that the idea merits a closer look and directed the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development to complete a study of possible tax incentives by December, which we will use to draft legislation for next session.

## Public Education

The session was a cliff-hanger for Tacoma and Parkland schools. But good news came on the last two days, when we finally convinced the legislative majority to restore funding and levy capacity that were key priorities for our local schools:

- Restored complex school needs grants = \$4.3 million statewide, \$728,000 for Tacoma schools.
- Restored 50% of magnet school funds = \$1.6 million statewide, \$544,000 for Tacoma schools.
- Restored \$10 million to Student Learning Improvement Grants = \$228,000 for Tacoma schools.
- Last-minute passage of a two percent increase in levy capacity will mean \$1.3 million for Tacoma schools in 1997-98.

## Veterans' Issues /

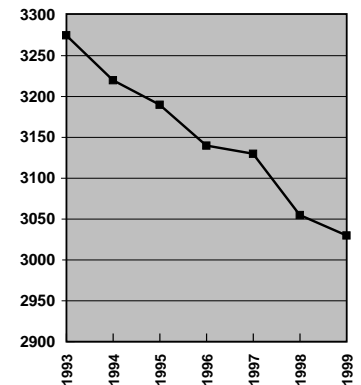
## World War II Memorial

Our state's World War II veterans will finally get the memorial they've deserved for more than 50 years. I served on the World War II advisory group which selected a design and location for the monument. When the State Capitol Committee inexplicably rejected the site preferred by veterans' organizations, I sponsored a bill that led the new members of the committee, including Gov. Locke, to endorse the veterans' preference. We are now in the process of raising the estimated \$500,000 for the memorial and hope to begin construction next fall.

## ► The Bad

## Public Education and the Cost of Living

As the accompanying chart shows, state spending for education continues to lag behind inflation. Perhaps the most visible sign of this failure is the meager 3% salary increase this session. We had a half billion dollar budget surplus, yet failed to adequately raise salaries for school employees and teachers (as well as state employees). This is shameful, and reflects our failure to meet our constitutional responsibility to fully fund basic education. The recent layoffs in the Tacoma School District further reflect this failure.



1993-1999 School Funding  
in Inflation-adjusted Dollars

## Basic Health Plan

By subsidizing low cost health insurance for working families, Washington's Basic Health Plan (BHP) offers the security of affordable health coverage to 135,000 people, while reducing the number of unpaid medical bills that drive up insurance costs for everyone else.

I was very disappointed that the Legislature broke its 1995 promise to have 200,000 people in the BHP by

this June. The new budget allows only 8,000 more people in the program, even though 3,500 uninsured workers apply for BHP coverage every *week*. I promise to continue my work for BHP expansion.

## Property-tax Relief

The Legislature enacted a 4.7% property-tax cut for 1997, and sent a proposal to voters that would make the tax cut permanent. I voted no because, as the accompanying chart demonstrates, the untargeted 4.7% tax cut drives millions to corporations and only peanuts to homeowners, a mere \$34 per year.

### Selected Impacts of 4.7% Property tax cut

<u>Estimated total savings: 1997-2003</u>	
Boeing .....	\$ 17,925,198
US West .....	\$ 5,746,651
Puget Power .....	\$ 4,891,213
GTE Northwest .....	\$ 3,214,354
Wash. Water Power ....	\$ 1,968,166
Microsoft .....	\$ 1,933,752
Owner of \$100,000 home .....	\$ 390

The Democratic minority proposed an alternative: *a homestead exemption to exempt \$60,000 of a home's value from property taxes*. This would have increased the tax relief for homeowners to *over \$200 per year*, but it was rejected by the Republican legislature.

## ► And The Ugly

### Workforce Training Slashed

The Legislature slashed \$60 million and an estimated 4,000 dislocated workers from proven workforce training and reemployment programs. The pain these

cuts will inflict on working families is particularly ugly in light of the revenue surplus and massive business tax breaks that characterized the session.

## Attack on Working Standards

At one point during the legislative session, there were over 60 bills which attacked working family wage standards, eroded job safety protections, and cut unemployment and injured worker benefits. Most illustrative was a bill which would have exempted hotel and restaurant workers from the scheduled increase in the federal minimum wage to \$5.15 this fall. Another bill would have increased the hours that our school-age teens could work. Another bill would have rolled back a unanimous Washington Supreme Court decision which allowed workers to seek civil damages when their employer forced them to work in unsafe conditions. Thanks to the governor's vetoes and common sense, many of these bills did not pass.

I would also note that the legislative majority did not allow hearings on bills to increase our state's minimum wage or expand family leave to allow working parents to attend school conferences. And despite a budget surplus, they refused to increase funding for prevailing wage enforcement or injured worker claims management.

We can do better, especially in good economic times.



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